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ABSTRACT

Over a 10-year period, the leadership at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington was instrumental in transforming a local university into a regional university that continues to evolve as a university that is engaged with diverse and various constituencies. Focusing on the role of the chancellor in spearheading the University's transition from merely articulating an outreach mission to more widespread practice of regional engagement, this paper recounts this evolution. Three engagement activities are detailed as examples of partnerships with specific constituencies in the region and internationally. These are: (1) the Global Virtual University, part of a Digital Communities Project with Japanese partners; (2) the Southeastern Public Interest Network of North Carolina, which provides an interactive Internet portal to offer services and information to more than 450 nonprofit organizations; and (3) the Executive Development Center, a state-of-the-art center for education and training. (Author/SLD)

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From Outreach to Engagement to Scholarship: An Evolution

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When James R. Leutze assumed the chancellorship at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington in 1991, the institution resembled many other mid-sized, comprehensive institutions geographically located *in,* but *not connected to,* diverse communities. Additionally, UNCW was not even fifty years old. Faculty infrequently ventured off-campus. When faculty did work with specific groups it was on a consultant basis. For the most part, faculty directed their activities to on campus academic programs and students.

Interviews with external human resources directors and training directors reflected that the university was not generally viewed as *responsive to* external requests such as extending credit classes off-campus. Some company representatives portrayed the university as sluggish in its responses to external requests. Similarly, some economic developers and non-profit organizations resented the university's approach to seeking regional solutions. The university was perceived as paternal when interacting with some external constituencies. Namely, university faculty and staff felt that it was their responsibility to offer solutions *to* local

and regional problems as experts in the area. Truly collegial partnerships were limited.

Seeking to chart a significantly different relationship between the university and the region, Chancellor Leutze created the Division for Public Service and Extended Education (later renamed to the Division for Public Service and Continuing Studies). During the early 1990s, Ernest Boyer and others were also discussing characteristics of the new American university and defining the scholarship of engagement. Senior administrators were advised to examine Boyer's paradigm. Thus, the creation of such a division can be seen as one means of reconsidering scholarship.

The Division for Public Service (as it is commonly called) was created to clearly articulate the university's commitment to the region. The newly formed division was intended to be a visible *liaison* unit charged with utilizing the resources of the university to help solve problems in the region. Moreover, the division was to serve as an *innovator* in outreach services that included employing the services of the North Carolina Information

Highway, the small business and technology development center, conference facilities, leadership development, lifelong learning, extended credit education, pre-college outreach, and technology outreach to improve the lives of *all* citizens in the region.

Throughout his 12-year tenure as chancellor, James Leutze was consistent in promoting the message that it was necessary for the university to engage in regional public service. Over the years, however, there were subtle changes in the outreach message. These changes reflected equally subtle transformations in the understanding and evolution of the concept of outreach on campus and in the various external communities.

In the early 1990s, the chancellor's message focused on "leveling the playing field" between urban and rural areas by employing the North Carolina Information Highway, with its two-way interactive audio/video to share resources. Yet, as the 20th century came to a close, the message was punctuated by a series of documentaries centering on the need to preserve the region's and nation's natural resources. These documentaries included *River Run, Treasure Coast,* and *Paving the American Dream.* They

signaled an environmental platform that raised the public awareness while creating a call to action. Likewise, the growth of the marine science program into world class status and the development of a strong academic program in creative writing were also examples of regional outreach and the expansion of the university influence on a national level.

By the late 1990s, the chancellor began to highlight that regional outreach was being performed by numerous academic units. The School of Nursing, for example, partnered with a rural community to develop a clinic, the School of Education contributed to professional development for K-12 teachers, and students volunteered numerous hours in the region. It became clear that there were numerous units in the university *operationalizing* the engagement message by collaborating with diverse community groups to solve regional problems. Finally, the message was permeating the university culture. It took nearly a decade for this visible evidence of a paradigm shift in the academic community.

The concept of the university as an *engaged* partner, nonetheless, was evolving on campus. The notion that the

university would *reach out* and *bring* solutions to solve problems was evolving to the realization that the university functioned better as a *long- term partner* and *collaborator with diverse communities in the region.*

In the spring of 2002, Chancellor Leutze announced his retirement to be effective in spring 2003. As is common in many such searches, the Chancellor's Search Committee scheduled open forums for all members of the university and community to identify specific qualities a new chancellor should possess. After a day of interviews, it became apparent that the university community and representatives from various communities perceived that it was necessary for the next chancellor to serve as a leader in the region. One university administrator, speaking before the search committee, affirmed that the university was a beacon of hope for the region that must continue to be *responsible* and *responsive* to the *diverse* and *varied* constituencies it served. The university's commitment to the region, it was proffered, should not languish because of changes in leadership, faculty, or staff. Another member of the university community cited the

collaboration between the School of Nursing and a rural community that had resulted in the building of a health clinic as an example of the potential for future university/community collaborations. Local and regional media noted that many who spoke before the search committee echoed the message of regional/community collaboration. Thus, at the dawn of the 21st century, the university and its diverse communities were beginning to realize the potential for collaborations that bring positive social change in the region.

Undoubtedly, an exploration of this evolution includes numerous factors not identified here, such as the hiring of new faculty open to redefining scholarship. The leadership of the chancellor and senior administrators, however, cannot be minimized. Likewise the facilitation and leadership of those in the Division for Public Service and Continuing Studies contributed to the evolution of outreach at UNCW. Three outreach projects, which served as a catalyst on campus and in the external community, have been identified and truncated to highlight salient features and some observable effects.

The Global Virtual University

In early 1998, Governor James Hunt requested that Chancellor Leutze furnish leadership for the virtual university component of the Digital Communities Project that was being spearheaded by representatives from JEIDA (Japanese Electronic Industry Development Association), several university presidents, and governors of prefectures in Japan. Overall, the Digital Communities (DC) project had been designed to promote the active participation and application of information technology by Japanese citizens. In the course of the project, various regulations and legal issues were examined and assumptions constructed about a 21st century global community.

The Digital Communities project also sought to examine how information technology could address problems and present solutions in health care, workforce development, intergovernmental collaborations, civic involvement in legislation,

and the development of new industries. The Digital Communities Steering Communities hoped to establish information communities characterized by collaborations between government, universities, citizens, businesses, and other countries. The Division for Public Service and Continuing Studies became involved with the developing Digital Communities Project in 1997. Four or five delegations visited UNCW representing the Digital Communities (DCs), Mie Prefecture, and Iwate Prefecture. The Japanese visitors viewed demonstrations of UNCW's distance learning capabilities, on-line courses, and conversed with UNCW faculty and staff. Leaders of the Digital Communities project and North Carolinians faced similar issues involving access to higher education, lifelong learning, healthcare, and distance barriers facing North Carolinians. Thus, UNCW agreed to participate in a pilot or experimental project with three Japanese universities: Mien University, Iwate Prefecture University, and Mie Prefecture College of Nursing.

The primary goals of this project were:

- To allow students to virtually study abroad
- To enable inter-university exchange between Japan and the United States,
- To learn more about distance learning system standardization, and
- To promote internationalization of local governments via exchange association networks over the Internet.

Partners: Japanese business group, three Japanese universities, and UNCW (School of Nursing, Foreign Language Department, and Computer Science). In the U.S., the partnership was facilitated and coordinated by UNCW's Division for Public Service and Continuing Studies.

Activities

- UNCW offers credit courses and non credit seminars to Japanese universities through two-way interactive video and the Internet
- UNCW faculty members and students in nursing visit and share knowledge

- There were numerous visits to the campuses of the universities involved by groups from other universities

Outcomes:

- International distance education experiment completed with numerous lessons learned about international distance education (e.g. perspectives embedded in online instruction)

- Online course process started at UNCW; the international collaboration was a catalyst for the development of online courses at UNCW
- Extensive travel and sharing of resources between UNCW and Japanese universities
- *Death and Dying* course designed by faculty in Mie Prefecture College of Nursing and UNCW's School of Nursing
- Special interests forums (Chancellor Leutze led several such forums) that allowed for exchange of diverse

perspectives on events that were of interest to all partners

- Interdisciplinary work on campus resulted in numerous interdisciplinary papers and presentations about the experimental project

SPINNC.org

The Southeastern Public Interest Network of North Carolina (SpinNC.org) provides an interactive Internet portal constructed by a representative board of directors representing public and private organizations. Staff in the Division for Public Service provided invaluable leadership and funding resources (grants) to help develop this project. The Spin portal employs the Internet tools to provide efficient services and information to over 450 nonprofit organizations numerous businesses in areas including philanthropy, community service directory, volunteer database,

and regional calendars. Yearly over 45,000 citizens visit SpinNC 160,000 times to access one or more of the services.

The primary goals of Spinnc.org are:

- To provide Internet technology that can be utilize by nonprofit and business organizations in a eleven-county region
- To employ the Internet to facilitate the effectiveness of organizations as they share resources, data, volunteers, and important information
- To facilitate the development of partnerships that improve will result in access to services for citizens
- To provide access to valuable information and services to citizens in southeastern North Carolina

Activities:

- Development of public interest network structure and components

- Development of Internet portal and nonprofit information tools
- Development of partnerships with various technology to facilitate delivery of services like online courses for just in time learning
- Grant writing

Outcomes

- Internet portal designed and in continuous refinement
- Initial media feedback positive
- External organizations use portal and provide feedback for refinement

Executive Development Center

The UNCW Executive Development Center, located in coastal North Carolina, offers corporate and community groups a state-of-the-art facility for education and training. The Center developed as a result of a partnership between UNCW and the

county. The county was renovating a grocery store for a library and needed a partner to occupy the property. The university needed a facility for executive development, and the region needed high-quality meeting space.

Thus, the Center was designed to feature first-class training rooms, executive boardrooms, a theater-style seminar room and a large meeting hall, all complemented by a full range of catering and conference services. To attract corporate clientele, the Center's location is emphasized -- a beautifully landscaped area just one mile west of Wrightsville Beach, NC. This coastal locale provides access to a broad range of recreational activities on one of the East Coast's finest beaches. Within walking distance of the Center are exceptional lodging accommodations, specialty shopping, and restaurants offering casual and fine dining. The Center's location also provides quick and easy access to such attractions as the historic downtown riverfront and is within minutes of the Wilmington International Airport.

To maximize its effectiveness in attracting business to the region, the Center is designed to accommodate groups of various sizes and needs. From the intimate setting of the boardroom to the large meeting hall that will seat 200, the Center's facilities provide maximum opportunity for interaction and comfort. During its first full year of operation, the EDC served the needs of over 6,000 persons. Feedback from conference and meeting participants indicate that the quality of the Center attracts business to the setting in which it is located.

Adding to the amenities is the fact that it is just steps away from two luxury hotels offering specialty suites, complimentary deluxe continental breakfast and other executive services. The relaxed coastal atmosphere, combined with the experienced and attentive professional staffs have been viewed as a plus to the local economy. Thus, it has not been difficult to attract partnerships with the nearby businesses to attract conferences and business retreats.

Because UNCW is recognized for its excellence in teaching, research, artistic achievement and service to southeastern North Carolina, numerous constituencies and other businesses near the Center viewed this partnership positively. *U.S. News and World Report's List of America's Best Colleges* recently ranked UNC Wilmington in the top 10 among regional universities in the South.

This same commitment to excellence is apparent in the design, development and operation of the UNCW Executive Development Center. Operated by the Division for Public Service and Continuing Studies, the Center offers state-of-the-art facilities and professional support to ensure every client has a productive and memorable meeting experience.

Furthermore, UNCW Executive Development Center offers a wide range of technical support throughout the entire facility. Telephone, fax, high-speed data and video connections are standard fare. In addition, the Center is equipped with a state-of-the-art wireless system. A wireless handheld remote provides presenters with complete control of the audio/visuals, lighting and screen from any point in the room, while the wireless computer system provides Internet access anywhere in the Center. The Center's superior technology greatly enhances any training experience.

To assist with attracting corporate clients to the area, the Center is designed specifically for the corporate customer. Seating in the entire facility was chosen for its comfort and style, as well as its ergonomic support for extended training sessions.

Corporate Partners

The EDC also has been successful in securing three corporate partners: The Office Showcase; The Residence Inn; and Swain and Associates (a local developer). Each corporate partner contributes financial support to the Center and receives the following acknowledgements:

- Room named for company
- Wall plaque in lobby
- Advertisement in EDC brochure
- Information page in notebook in lobby
- Listed on EDC web site & hot linked
- Discount on facility use fees
- Room named for company

Activities:

Development of corporate partners

Advertising of Center at appropriate venues

Courting of corporate business groups for seminars, retreats, and business meeting

Outcomes:

- Increase conference business
- Recruitment of corporate sponsors for UNCW
- Continual development of engagement paradigm with the county

Synopsis:

Even though the three aforementioned engagement activities delineated were facilitated and/or created by the Division for Public Service and Continuing Studies, there are others that can be recounted. These engagement activities were selected because of their mutually beneficial outcomes and their contribution to the evolution of the paradigm of outreach at UNCW.

Because of the evolution of engagement on campus, UNCW has become a trusted community partner. It has become clear that various constituencies in the region are responding to UNCW *walking the walk of engagement.*

An unanticipated, but positive, effect of creating the Division for Public Service is that it attracts personnel who are committed on a professional and personal level to public service activities. Almost all staff serves in leadership roles as board members of nonprofit organizations and contribute to improving life in the region. They spread the message 24/7 of positive social action!

Abstract:

Over a ten-year period, the leadership at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington was instrumental in transforming a local university into a regional university that continues to evolve as a university that is engaged with diverse and various constituencies. Focusing on the role of the chancellor in spearheading UNCW's transition from merely articulating an outreach mission to more widespread practice of regional engagement, this paper recounts this evolution. Three engagement activities are detailed as examples of partnerships with specific constituencies in the region and internationally.

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